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Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session

Observer status for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in the General Assembly

Letter dated 6 August 1999 from the representatives of Australia, Barbados, Belgium, Botswana, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, India, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The undersigned representatives of member States of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) have the honour to request, in accordance with rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "Observer status for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in the General Assembly".

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, an explanatory memorandum is attached to this request (see annex).

We should be grateful if the item could be allocated to the plenary of the General Assembly.

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Annex

Explanatory memorandum

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA or the Institute) is an international intergovernmental organization, based in Stockholm, Sweden, which was established by the Agreement Establishing the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, concluded in Stockholm on 27 February 1995 by 14 foundling member States. It currently has 17 member States (as at 30 June 1999) as well as a non-member State contributor, with outstanding membership applications by several States. Its overall mandate is to promote sustainable democracy and assist democratization worldwide.

More concretely, the objectives of International IDEA are as follows:

- To promote and advance sustainable democracy worldwide;
- To broaden the understanding and promote the implementation and dissemination of the norms, rules and guidelines that apply to multi-party pluralism and democratic processes;
- To strengthen and support national capacity to develop a full range of democratic instruments;
- To provide a meeting place for exchanges between all those involved in electoral processes in the context of democratic institution-building;
- To increase knowledge and enhance learning about democratic electoral processes;
- To promote transparency and accountability, professionalism and efficiency in the electoral process in the context of democratic development.

Within the broad mandate, International IDEA currently has four pillars of activities: rules and guidelines programme, which aims at standard-setting for democratic practices; capacity-building programme, which aims at building democratic capacities in selected countries or regions; applied research programme, which aims at bridging the gap between academia and practitioners by providing meeting places as well as practical research activities within its sphere of competence; and information services on democracy-related issues. In all its activities, International IDEA adopts a non-prescriptive approach to democracy promotion and democratization assistance, and therefore chooses to provide options for democratization rather than a predetermined solution. The work of International IDEA is supported by an international secretariat composed of some 50 staff members, recruited internationally.

The Institute's organs consist of the Council, the Nominating Committee, the Board of Directors, the Secretary-General and the Secretariat. The governing Council gives the overall direction of the Institute's work, reviews the activities of the Institute, and appoints the members of the Board of Directors and the Nominating Committee. The Board of Directors, appointed by the Council, consists of between 9 and 15 members, serving in their personal capacities, who are selected on the basis of accomplishment in the fields of law, electoral techniques and politics and in the relevant areas of academia. The Board of Directors develops the policies of the Institute on the basis of the overall direction given by the Council and appoints the Secretary-General. The Nominating Committee, appointed by the Council, nominates distinguished personalities to serve as members of the Board of Directors for appointment by the Council.

One important feature of International IDEA's work method in democratization assistance is its partnership with other international organizations, as democratization is closely linked to promotion of other substantive policy issues, such as human rights, conflict management, sustainable development, representativeness and inclusiveness and transparency. In this context, the Institute currently has memoranda of understanding or cooperation agreements with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Inter-American Development Bank. International IDEA also works closely with other international or regional organizations, such as various parts of the United Nations (in particular with the Electoral Assistance Division), World Bank, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union. Given the importance of working with civil society, currently five international non-governmental organizations, which have met the approval of the Council, are also associated with the Institute.

In the coming years, International IDEA will continue to focus in its work programme on several key themes, such as democracy and conflict management, the relationship between democratization, sustainable development and poverty eradication and the right to democracy as a human right. It will also continue to have substantive capacity-building activities in selected countries. In all those work areas, it is believed that an increased exchange with the United Nations would be crucial. While International IDEA has already been working with the United Nations through various arrangements, it considers it desirable to consolidate and strengthen links between the United Nations, and that an observer status in the General Assembly would be mutually beneficial. Consequently, pursuant to a decision taken by its Council and the Board of Directors, International IDEA requests that it be granted observer status in the General Assembly.